

Make Your Meetings Matter

Meetings are a necessary part of working together, but we have all been in our share of disappointing meetings. As a leader, you have the chance to effectively steward your people's time, provide a healthy culture and protect them from tedious energy-wasting meetings. Consider that the typical professional attends over 60 meetings per month and that the Harvard Business Review found that **71% of leaders viewed meetings as unproductive and inefficient.**



The following advice is basic. There may not be much new information here for you, but the real question is whether you apply these ideas to every meeting you lead. We all have room to improve.

1. Send A Written Agenda In Advance

If you are just getting started with agendas, begin with a form list of topics to be addressed and ensure that material is provided to attendees at least one day before the meeting. For best results, provide preparation before the meeting so that everyone attending is ready to contribute. What about when you are asked to participate in a meeting without an agenda? Ask, "Can you please send me an agenda for the meeting so that I can prepare?"

For each agenda item, **Clarify the outcome.** For example: to update, to discuss, to debate, to decide, to evaluate, etc. *Limit the time given to updates.* Many updates can be accomplished by asking the point person to write a half-page update and having members read before the meeting and come ready with questions.

***Spend your meeting time on what matters most.** This may seem obvious, but the most important topics are often pushed out by, trivial communication or decisions that can often be delegated to individuals or lower levels. For Christian leaders, especially, be sure to attend to the responsibilities that God has placed on leaders. (We should be focusing on leading, developing and caring for people.)

Pro Tips: For frequently held meetings, such as a weekly status meeting on a project, you can save time by creating a meeting template. Once you have that in place, preparing an agenda becomes a matter of filling in the blanks. (see the example on the last page.)

2. Think carefully about who should attend

The people in the meeting room make or break your effectiveness. We have been in MANY meetings where the key person is not present. As a result, no significant decisions can be made.

In general, limit the number of people attending the meeting. The purpose of meetings is to make decisions and get work done. For the most part, meetings are not the best way to share information. (exception: meetings are helpful to share sensitive information)

3. Bring all voices into the conversation.

- Go around the room and ask the quieter members of the team for their opinion.
- Be on the lookout for interruptions. If someone gets cut off, provide cover by saying, "Hang on, Jessica, Daniel wasn't finished."
- Foster a welcoming environment by repeating that everyone's input matters and there are no 'stupid' ideas or questions.
- Try giving people 1-2 minutes to jot some notes on how they would answer your question. This will enable everyone some space to think and will allow your introverted members to contribute more deeply.

4. Manage the meeting by the clock

Beginning and ending on time will enable others to trust you more as a leader. They will sense that you value their time and don't take it for granted. When nobody takes responsibility for managing the time, the meeting will most

certainly be careless and unfocused. On your agenda, write the time allotted for each item (see example below) and remind the responsible person how much time they have. If needed, use a timer.

Pro Tip: If you are running a large or complex meeting, consider asking a co-worker to serve as a timekeeper. If this topic is tricky for you, the “parking lot habit” (see below) will be helpful!

5. Use the “Parking Lot” to manage off-topic discussions.

This helpful device performs two valuable functions. First, it serves to keep the meeting focused on the stated agenda. Second, the parking lot acknowledges important points raised by attendees.

As a meeting organizer, here are a few steps to use the parking lot:

1. At the beginning of the meeting, explain you expect everyone to focus their discussions on the agenda. Further, explain that this rule will help the meeting stay productive and end on time.
2. Keep the meeting agenda document in front of you as a guide.
3. Go through each agenda item.
4. When someone raises an interesting point that does not relate to the agenda, say the following: *“Thank you for that point, Tim. However, this goes beyond the purpose of this meeting. Let me write down that item in the parking lot, and I will include it in the meeting notes that I will send out by email so we can explore that point at the right time.”*

Warning: The Parking Lot habit must be combined with the Follow Up habit if you wish to be truly effective. Otherwise, you are likely to gain a reputation for simply making a show of acknowledging other people.

6. Take notes for yourself

Taking notes in meetings is an essential skill, yet so few leaders do it. The key reason to take notes in a meeting is to record any questions or assignments that have been directed to you.

Pro Tip: Use a copy of the agenda and use that document to guide your note-taking. Focus on the decisions made in the meeting and items that require further investigation or action on your part.

7. Follow up

For the best results, follow up within 24 hours of the meeting. This habit leads to action and accountability, leveraging the excellent meeting you lead. Sending out a meeting summary, even a few bullet points, is a most beneficial practice.

Here are some possible items for follow up communication:

- Summary notes
- Decisions made
- Team member’s action steps/responsibilities
- Parking lot items
- Confirm next meeting date and time

8. Ask team members for feedback about the meeting.

When was the last time you asked your followers for feedback about your team meetings? This takes courage, but nothing communicates openness and humility other than seeking honest feedback and really listening.

Some questions you can ask to improve your team meetings:

- Should this meeting be shorter / longer / more frequent / less frequent, etc.
- How can we make this meeting more effective?
- What’s your favorite part about this meeting? Least favorite?

In addition to my personal experience, some of the material in this resource was gathered from various internet sites including: <http://projectmanagementhacks.com>, <https://www.forbes.com>, <https://digital.com/>

MEETING AGENDA EXAMPLE

Wednesday, June 17, 8am to 9:45am

Regular Members: Teru, Francis, Stefan, George, Lupin

Guests members: Julie, Takahashi

Facilitator: Lupin

Location: Zoom

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86433338663>

Password: 111122

Preparation:

- Read Takahashi's update (attached to this email) about the new outreach come ready with questions.
- Read monthly financial highlights come ready to discuss

1. **Review Agenda** (2 minutes) Lupin
2. **Devotion** (15mins) Francis
3. **Review Action Steps from last month's meeting** (7 minutes) Lupin
4. **Discuss and debate relocation of Nav Office to Roppongi Hills** (45 minutes) George
Outcome: A list of pros and cons for the idea of relocating to Roppongi
5. **Discuss the new ministry in Chiba** (10 minutes) Takahashi
Outcome: Understand the situation in Chiba by asking questions as a team and Takahashi answering them.
6. **Discuss and decide on new training curriculum** (30 minutes) Stefan
Outcome: Compare the two possible curriculums and make a decision on which one to use.
7. **Review monthly financial highlights** (7 minutes) Teru
Outcome: Stay alert of financial progress
8. **Break into pairs and pray for area leaders** (15 minutes) Everyone
Outcome: Continue to support area leaders by regularly praying for them.
9. **Confirm Action Steps** (3 minutes) Lupin
10. **Confirm upcoming schedule and next meeting** (3 minutes) Lupin

Notes: